BIGGLESWADE URBAN DISTRICT.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

For the Year 1918.

TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE BIGGLESWADE URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen,—

I beg to present to you the following report on the Health of your District for the year 1918.

VITAL STATISTICS.

Population.

Estimated civilian population used for the calculation of the (civilian) death-rate. 4,873.

Estimated population used for the calculation of the birth-rate, 5,460.

These figures have been supplied by the Registrar General for the purpose of this Report.

Births.

The number of Births registered during the year was 91, being 44 males and 47 females. This is equal to a birth rate of 16.6 per 1,000 of the population. This is the lowest rate recorded.

The birth rate for 1917 was 17, and the average for the past ten years is 22.

Seven of the births registered during the year, viz., 3 males and 4 females, were illegitimate.

The birth rate for the whole of England and Wales for the year 1918 was 17.7.

Deaths.

106 Deaths occurred among the civilian population belonging to the district, viz.:—51 males and 55 females, representing a death rate of 21.75 per thousand of the population

as compared with 13.0 for the year 1917. The average for the last ten years is 15.7.

The death rate for England and Wales for 1917 was 17.6.

Causes of Death.	Males.	Females
Measles	3	5
Diphtheria	—	1
Influenza	9	10
Pulmonary Tuberculosis	5	6
Cancer	5	4
Meningitis	1	—
Organic Heart Disease	3	2
Bronchitis	2	1
Pneumonia (all forms)	4	8
Other Respiratory Diseases	1	1
Diarrhœa, etc (under 2 years)	1	1
Congenital Debility, etc.	1	1
Nephritis and Bright's Disease	—	1
Violence, apart from Suicide	1	2
Suicide	1	—
Other defined diseases	14	11
Causes ill-defined or unknown	—	1
	51	55

Infantile Mortality.

Nine deaths occurred among children under one year of age, viz: 5 males and 4 females which is equal to a death-rate of 98.9 per 1000 births, as compared with 76 for 1917.

The average deaths per 1000 births during the past ten years has been 96.9.

Zymotic Death-rate.

There were nine deaths from Zymotic Diseases during the year, viz: Measles 8, and Diphtheria 1, being equal to a death-rate of 1.8 per 1000 of the population.

Infectious Diseases.

During the year 617 cases of infectious disease were notified amongst the civilian population, as follows:—

Scarlet Fever	15
Measles	578
Diphtheria	19
Erysipelas	3
Enteric Fever	1
Puerperal Fever	1

14 of the Diphtheria and 12 Scarlet Fever cases were removed to the Isolation Hospital.

Four cases of Scarlet Fever, 1 case of Diphtheria, and 3 cases of Measles occurred amongst the troops billeted in the town.

Measles.

The epidemic started in February and declined in May, and the following is the monthly record of cases notified:—

February	9
March	239
April	318
May	10
June	1

The first case occurred on Feb. 6th, and was probably started by a visitor from Sandy, who had recently been on a visit to London, and was notified as suffering from measles on January 28th, after return to Sandy. Four further cases occurred on February 27th, and four others on March 8th. On March 11th, ten cases were notified from different parts of the town, and from this date the epidemic made rapid progress, all parts of the town being affected.

The Council and Church Schools were closed on March 21st, and intimations sent to the various Sunday Schools recommending closure, which was carried out.

The Sanitary Inspector made a house to house visitation in the poorer parts of the town, and as the disease continued to spread the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, and the Clerk of the Council, were consulted with reference to the advisability of appointing a nurse to visit the cases and advise parents as to treatment. As a result, Nurse Miller was asked to undertake this work, and there is no doubt her services were of great value, especially among a certain proportion of the population, where many parents appeared ignorant of the serious consequences that may occur through children suffering from measles not receiving proper attention. In all cases where soldiers were found to be billeted in houses where measles occurred the military authorities were notified and the soldiers isolated. The only persons connected with the Army who contracted measles in the town were one private of the R.E., and two women of the W.A.A.C.

8 Deaths occurred from measles during the epidemic, and in all of these pneumonia was present as a complication.

Diphtheria.

Of the 19 cases of diphtheria, 8 occurred in the first quarter of the year, 5 in the second quarter, and 6 in the third quarter.

5 cases occurred in children in the Union Workhouse, 3 were in-members of the same family, 1 a nurse at the Isolation Hospital, 1 a soldier who was probably infected before arrival in Biggleswade, and 1 case was infected from a previous case in the same house. No definite information as to source of infection in the remaining 8 cases could be obtained.

Scarlet Fever.

Of the 15 cases, 6 occurred in the 1st Quarter of the year, 3 in the 2nd Quarter, and 6 in the 3rd Quarter. Of these, 2 occurred in the same house, 4 in soldiers billeted in the town, 1 in a house with a previous case. In two cases the disease was contracted outside the district, and in the remaining 6 nothing definite could be traced.

Tuberculosis.

Eleven "Primary" notifications of Pulmonary Tuberculosis and three of "other forms" of Tuberculosis were received.

Each case was visited and the premises inspected.

Eleven deaths from Pulmonary Tuberculosis were registered, and in each instance the premises were disinfected.

The following is a list of notifications received and deaths registered during the last nine years, and it will be seen that no improvement is shown in the incidence of the disease, but in fact rather the reverse.

	Notifications received.		Deaths.		Percentage of deaths from Tuberculosis to deaths from all causes.
	Pulmonary.	Other forms.	Pulmonary.	Other forms.	
1918	11	3	11	—	10.4 per cent
1917	9	1	5	—	8 ,,
1916	7	3	8	1	9.5 ,,
1915	7	3	4	2	7 ,,
1914	6	4	4	2	7.7 ,,
1913	10	—	6	1	8.7 ,,
1912	11	—	7	1	9.6 ,,
1911	1	—	3	1	5.7 ,,
1910	—	—	4	2	8.5 ,,
1909	—	—	10	1	12 ,,

Average for 10 years equals 8.9 per cent.

Influenza Epidemic.

Influenza was epidemic throughout the whole of the district during the last quarter of the year. Commencing in the early part of October the disease spread rapidly until practically all parts of the town were affected.

The disease continued until the early days of December and then rapidly declined. All classes of the community were affected and in many cases the disease was of a very virulent type. Pneumonia being a frequent complication.

The first death occurred on October 20th, and between that date and the end of December, 22 deaths occurred in the following weeks :

Week ending October 26th	5
,, ,, November 2nd	7
,, ,, ,, 9th	3
,, ,, ,, 16th	3
,, ,, ,, 23rd	2
,, ,, ,, 30th	0
,, ,, December 7th	2

Three of the deaths were in persons usually resident in other districts. In 14 cases the cause of death was certified as Influenza and Pneumonia, and in 3 cases Bronchitis was associated with the disease, in 1 case influenza alone was the cause of death, and in other cases Tuberculosis, Heart Disease, Debility and Emphysema were secondary causes of death.

The following list shows the districts in which the deaths occurred, the majority of them being in cottages situated in poor localities :—

Sun Street	5
Chapel Fields and Cowfairlands	2
Newtown and Potton Road	4
Back Street and Victoria Place	2
The Dells	1
Mill Lane	1
Hitchin Street	3
Lodging House	1
Shortmead Street	1
Station Road	1
Fairfield Road	1

The Biggleswade Council and Church Schools were closed from October 23rd to November 8th, and the managers of the Empire Cinema and George's Hall discontinued holding matinees during the time the Elementary Schools were closed.

The following table shows the sex and ages at which death occurred :—

Age.	Males.	Females
4 years	1	1
17 ,,	1	—
23 to 26 ,,	3	—
32 to 38 ,,	5	1
48 to 50 ,,	2	—
57 to 68 ,,	1	3
74 to 75 ,,	1	1
80 ,,	—	1

There is no doubt that overcrowding, badly ventilated rooms and lack of care, contribute largely to the spread of the disease, whilst well ventilated, airy rooms and care being taken in the early stages of the disease, by the patient going to bed at the first feeling of illness and calling in their medical attendant, greatly assist in the recovery and prevention of complications. I, however, realise frequently the impracticability of isolation being carried out in many cottages in the district, and particularly where overcrowding exists.

Water Supply

1,235 dwelling houses are supplied with water from the mains of the Biggleswade Water Board. No new connections have been made during the year.

Drainage, Domestic Refuse and Scavenging.

1,136 dwelling houses are connected with the public sewers. No new connections were made during the year, but the matter is receiving attention with regard to the 22 remaining properties.

The question of removal of domestic refuse has been unsatisfactory owing to difficulty in obtaining adequate labour. This matter is, however, receiving attention, and now

I see no reason why every house should not have all refuse collected and removed at least once a week.

Dairies, Cowsheds and Workshops.

There are 10 persons registered as Cowkeepers or Dairymen.

During the year all Cowsheds and Dairies have been inspected. Notices of defects were served in the case of two premises, one required cleansing, and in the other structural repairs were necessary. In both instances the notices were complied with.

The importance of the cleanly collection and distribution of milk cannot be too strongly urged. At the present moment the various Orders and Regulations issued affecting Milk Supply do not meet modern requirements, and it is to be hoped that in the near future the various defects of past Acts will be remedied so that the supply of pure milk, especially for young children, will be amply provided for.

Workshops and Bakehouses.

There are 46 of these premises under inspection, and generally speaking they are kept in a fairly satisfactory condition.

Slaughterhouses and Food Inspection.

There are 6 slaughter houses in the district. The premises have been frequently visited by the Sanitary Inspector and the regulations found to be well observed.

A quantity of canned food and a carcase of a cow was inspected and condemned as unfit for human consumption.

Housing.

On referring to the Annual Report for the year 1912, I find that at that date my predecessor, the late Dr. Bywater, wrote of the "very unsatisfactory nature of housing conditions," and since then with the exception of 22 houses built by the Council and completed in 1913, 7 other new houses were erected in 1913, one in 1914, and none since that date. The conditions which were bad then, and were only very slightly improved by the addition of 22 Council Cottages, have now become much worse, and over-crowding has seriously increased in the town. Wherever I go I am met with requests for more houses fit for people to live in, and I am much concerned at the unhealthy conditions under which a large number of the inhabitants are living in this, a rural neighbourhood. As I pointed out in my quarterly report for the quarter ending the 31st March this year, it has apparently been the custom in the past to build chiefly in the lower parts of the town and near the river, which often overflows in winter time, causing flooding of cellars and consequent dampness. In addition the houses are very much crowded together to the total exclusion of sun light, and airspace between adjoining properties, and gardens are lacking. With regard to construction a very large number are built of lath and plaster instead of more durable material, are soon affected by the weather, and unless constantly watched and patched up, quickly get out of repair. These repairs owners are frequently unwilling or unable to carry out, and indeed much of the property is not in the condition to warrant the expense that would be entailed to produce even a moderately satisfactory result.

The accommodation afforded also leaves much to be desired. Few properties possess a parlour in addition to the living room. A large majority have only two bedrooms, one of which is often little better than a boxroom. Sanitary conveniences have to be shared with neighbours, and such necessities as cupboards, larders, fuel stores, etc., are conspicuous by their absence.

Below is set out a table giving the number of houses in certain areas with the number of bedrooms in each, from which it will be seen what a large proportion contain 1 or 2 bedrooms only.

District.	Number of Houses. One bedroom.	Two Bedrooms.	Three or more bedrooms.	Total Houses.
Cowfair Lands	10	35	10	55
Palace Street and Foundry Lane	10	26	3	39
Back Street East of Railway Bridge... ...	3	22	3	28
Back Street (West end), Victoria Place, Roolham's Twitchell	8	21	6	35
Manchester Row and Waterloo Cottages, Hitchin Street	—	12	1	13
	31	116	23	170

If a census of the whole town were taken I estimate that more than 50 per cent. of the houses would be found to have not more than two bedrooms.

The minimum requirements for each house are in my opinion the following :—living room, parlour, scullery or scullery and wash-house combined, with water laid on, larder, fuel store, bathroom, and three bedrooms, one of which should be large enough to hold comfortably one double bed and one cot, separate sanitary conveniences to each house and liberal cupboard accommodation should also be provided. Good gardens should be allotted to each house, and the houses built not more than 8 to an acre and possibly fewer than this, if the price of land is not excessive.

In order to bring house property to somewhere approaching the above standard I estimate that about 400 houses will probably have to be built in the next 2 or 3 years, but this number will of course vary to some extent, according to what owners are prepared to do in the matter of alterations to existing properties. I have already asked for the immediate erection of 150 houses to enable me to deal with the present state of overcrowding, and to close houses especially unfit for occupation, and I am glad to note that you are already taking up this question seriously, and have selected sites suitable for the erection of about 200 houses, in addition to the small site which you already possess.

I feel that we shall never make progress in eliminating the scourge of Tuberculosis, nor can we hope to improve the general standard of health in the country, or expect the present generation to become cleanly and contented people, until we provide houses fit to live in, and I therefore urgently bring this very important question to your notice with confidence, knowing that you also are anxious for improvement in existing conditions.

Appended hereto is a summary of the work carried out by your Sanitary Inspector.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,
Your obedient Servant,

J. HUTCHINSON WOOD,
Medical Officer of Health.

Council Offices,
Biggleswade.
August, 1919.

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SUMMARY OF WORK CARRIED OUT BY THE SANITARY INSPECTOR (Mr. Thomas Cockrill) during 1918.

Nuisances.

Defective Drains	21
Insanitary Closets	9
Dirty and Dilapidated Properties	6
Damp Walls and Floors	2
Defective Guttering and Down-pipes	2
Dangerous Buildings	2
Accumulations of Manure	4
Defective Water Supply	2
Overcrowding	4
Dangerous Trees	2
Other Nuisances	7

1 statutory notice was served upon an owner of property, Sun Street, to repair closets, which work was carried out.

House Drainage.

The number of dwelling houses connected with the public sewers is 1,136, and there are at present 22 unconnected, which are receiving attention.

Water Supply.

The number of dwelling houses connected with the public water supply are 1,235.

Slaughter-houses.

Number on Register	6
Inspections made	48

Cowsheds and Dairies.

Number on Register	10
Inspections made	55

A statutory notice was served upon an owner to carry out alterations, which notice was complied with.

One preliminary notice was served upon an owner to cleanse.

Workshops and Bake-houses.

Number on Register	46
Inspections made	82

Two preliminary notices were served to cleanse premises.

Common Lodging Houses.

Number on Register	2
Visits paid	8

Infectious Diseases.

During February, March and April 536 cases of measles were notified. The homes of these were inspected by the Sanitary Inspector and Nurse Miller, the latter having been appointed by the Council to assist the Sanitary Inspector during the epidemic.

Other cases of Infectious Diseases were investigated by the Sanitary Inspector and reported upon.

The number of rooms disinfected were 43.

The Day Schools, one Public Hall and one Private School were disinfected.

One prosecution for failing to notify a case of measles, and the person was fined £1 including costs.

Food Inspection.

A quantity of canned fish and fruit at the premises of a local provision merchant were inspected and found unfit for human consumption and condemned.

A carcase of a cow at a slaughter house was inspected and condemned, being found unfit for human consumption.